

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6274

CONFIDENTIAL MANAMA 1315

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRD, ELAB, BA

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON LABOR STANDARDS

REF: STATE 136706

1. BAHRAIN HAS NO RPT NO LABOR STANDARDS OR REGULATIONS WHICH HAVE A DISRUPTING OR DISTORTING EFFECT ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE. THE GOB IS JUST BEGINNING TO DRAFT MOST OF ITS LABOR STANDARDS AND THEY ARE BROADLY BASED UPON BRITISH OR EGYPTIAN STANDARDS KNOWN TO EXPATRIATE ADVISORS EMPLOYED BY THE GOB.

2. WITH ONLY TWO EXPORT INDUSTRIES, BOTH BASED ECONOMICALLY ON PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS, AND A MAJOR DRYDOCK SUPPLYING SERVICES TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE, THERE IS LITTLE OPPORTUNITY FOR LABOR STANDARDS IN BAHRAIN WHICH WOULD DISTORT INTERNATIONAL TRADE. ALSO THE GENERAL SHORTAGE OF SEMI-SKILLED AND SKILLED LABOR IN ALL SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY DOES NOT PRTVIDE THE NECESSARY WEEWAY FOR UNBALANCED AND DISTORTING LABOR PRACTICES--

3. THE GOB IS VERY MUCH CONCERNED WITH PROTECTING ITS OWN LIMITED SUPPLY OF LABOR AND IS VERY MUCH AWARE OF THE COSTS OF LOST-TIME ACCIDENTS IN A LABOR-SHORT ECONOMY. THEY HAVE, CONFIDENTIAL

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THEREQRE, DURING THE PAST 18 MONTHS DECREED A NUMBER OF HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS WHICH ARE MODERN AND COMPREHENSIVE BY DEVELOPING COUNTRY STANDARDS. THESE APPLY UNIFORMLY THROUGHOUT THE ECONOMY -- EXEMPTING ONLY FIRMS WITH VERY FEW EMPLOYEES. IN THE BAHRAIN ECONOMY THESE STANDARDS APPLY PRIMARILY TO SMALLER ASSEMBLY INDUSTRIES AND TO THE BUILDINGS TRADES AND THEREFORE HAVE VERY LITTLE, IF ANY, IMPACT ON

INTERNATIONAL TRADE.

4. BAHRAIN DOES PROHIBIT THE EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 13 EXCEPT UNDER SPECIAL PERMIT, NONE OF WHICH HAVE BEEN APPLIED FOR. THE AGE GROUP 13-16 IS DEFINED UNDER THE LABOR LAW AS JUVENIEL AND IS LIMITED TO A MAXIMUM OF SIX HOURS EMPLOYMENT EACH DAY WITH NO RPT NO NIGHT DUTY. SLAVERY IS ILLEGAL UNDER THE GENERAL LAWS AND TREATIES OF BAHRAIN AND IS NOT TREATED DEPARATELY UNDER THE LABOR LAWS. INDENTURED OR OTHER FORCED LABOR IS NOT MENTIONED SPECIFICALLY IN ANY LAWS BUT IS BELIEVED TO BE ILLEGAL. THERE IS IN PRACTICE A MINOR DEGREE OF SEMI-FORCED LABOR WITH SOME DOMESTIC SERVANTS AND UNSKILLED LABORERS IN VERY SMALL INDUSTRIES. THESE ARE WORKERS BROUGHT PRIMARILY FROM THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT ON "NO-OBJECTION" CERTIFICATES SECURED BY EMPLOYERS. WE KNOW OF A FEW CASES IN WHICH THESE OFTEN ILLITERATE WORKERS REMAIN AT SALARY RATES BELOW THOSE IN THE ECONOMY, OR ELSE PAY A PORTION OF SALARY TO FORMER EMPLOYERS WHO MAINTAIN CERTIFICATES, UNDER THREAT OF CERTIFICATE WITHDRAWAL AND DEPORTATION.; THESE OBJEDED ARE STILL EARNING MANY TIMES MORE THAN THEY WOULD IN THEIR HOME COUNTRIES AND THEREFORE THERE ARE SELDOM ANY COMPLAINTS. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THIS MINOR EXCEPTION TO A GENERAL RULE HAS NO IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE.

5. THE PRACTICES OF KOREAN CONTRACTORS IN THIS REGION MIGHT BE WORTH INVESTIGATION BY THE INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE BUT WE CONFIDENTIAL

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CAN PROVIDE LITTLE SOLID INFORMATION. MANY KOREAN, AND OTHER ASIAN CONTRACTORS, HAVE BECOME VERY SUCCESSFUL IN THIS REGION, PRIMARILY DUE TO LABOR COSTS AND PRACTICES. THEIR LABOR IS ALMOST WHOLLY IMPORTED FROM THE HOME COUNTRY AND LIVE IN LARGE CAMPS THAT OFTEN ARE ALMOST "EXTRA-TERRITORIAL". NATIVE FOOD, ENTERTAINMENT, ETC., ARE OFTEN SUPPLIED ENTIRELY WITHIN THE CAMPS AND ACCESS TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY RESTRICTED. PARTIAL SALARIES ARE PAID ON ZUTAAYITH THE BULK PAID IN THE HOME COUNTRY AT TERMINATION OF CONTRACT. THERE ARE FREQUENT ALLEGATIONS OF POOR LIVING CONDITIONS, INSUFFICIENT FOOD AND ENFORCED LONG HOURS. TROUBLEMAKERS ARE ALLEGEDLY PLACED ON PLANES BACK TO THE HOME COUNTRY AND BARRED FROM FURTHER EMPLOYMENT IN THIS REGION. THE EMBASSY PRESUMES THAT SOME OF THE RUMORS CONCERNING THESE PRACTICES CAME FROM UNSUCCESSFUL COMPETITORS WHO HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO MATCH THE COST AND DELIVERY TIMES OF ASIAN CONTRACTORS. HOST GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN HAPPY ENOUGH WITH COST AND DELIVERY ON LARGE PROJECTS THAT THEY HAVE NOT INVESTIGATED THOROUGHLY.

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